



WalkBoston

May 5, 2011

Thomas Broderick, Acting Chief Engineer  
MassDOT— Highway Division  
10 Park Plaza  
Boston MA 02116

RE: Proposed Symphony Area Streetscape Improvements— 25% Design Hearing  
Project # 604871

Dear Mr. Broderick:

WalkBoston submits its comments on the 25% plans for the Symphony Area Project presented at the public hearing on April 26, 2011. We have been involved in the project design from its inception.

The plan presented is a big improvement for this very busy pedestrian area around Symphony Hall. Particularly good is the choice of concrete for the sidewalk ROW material. If that choice turns out to be an issue for “historic” reasons, we request that research be done to document the original sidewalk paving material.

WalkBoston supports elimination of the two U-turn vehicle loops on the Huntington Avenue overpass; a new left turn from Massachusetts Avenue into Huntington Avenue westbound; the new crosswalk to Symphony Hall at the end of Horticultural Hall; and the 8-foot curb extensions, which we are comfortable seeing reduced to 6 feet to accommodate bicycles at intersections. We also endorse the suggestion by Mr. John Kelly to relocate the pedestrian crosswalk on Westland Avenue crossing to Whole Foods.

WalkBoston’s concerns and requests for plan changes are:

Sidewalks: Existing sidewalks, especially in front and alongside Symphony Hall and in front of Horticultural Hall, are very narrow. We urge you to widen sidewalks wherever possible and, in any case, not narrow them or clutter them with unnecessary street furniture or utilities.

A potential source of negative sidewalk impacts are the locations for accessibility access to Symphony station. We request that these very necessary improvements be located so as not to narrow existing sidewalks. For instance, the possible elevator mentioned for the southwest corner of Mass Ave should be located in the right travel lane, not on the narrow sidewalk, with the bus stop moved slightly south to allow it. Please include WalkBoston in this ongoing planning.

Proposed New Signals: Signals proposed at the entrance to Mass Ave for exiting traffic from the Christian Science garage are clearly not justified by the meager traffic numbers presented at earlier planning meetings. Signals will clutter up the sidewalk, restrict timing for other movements and add project costs and operational challenges. In the future, those cars, as they do now, can exit right without a signal. Adding a left turn out of Christian Science

would complicate the new crosswalk. Since Westland Avenue traffic is not allowed to turn left into Mass Ave, allowing for such a turn for private traffic is ill-advised.

The new WALK signals proposed where the U-turns are currently located (parallel with Mass Ave) are not needed. They will add sidewalk clutter and be ignored.

Future Signal Timing: Currently, pedestrian WALK timing for the heavily used north crossing of Mass Ave to Symphony Hall is very poor. Additional WALK time could be added by eliminating the separate green light for eastbound Huntington Avenue traffic that is turning left to proceed north along Mass Ave. The number of cars making this move in any cycle is small enough to wait at the Symphony light, thus allowing additional WALK time across the intersection. We request this change be made now, and certainly the poor timing should not be continued in the future.

Push Buttons: At the April 26 public hearing, the MassDOT and Boston Transportation Department representatives seemed to believe installation of push buttons is required. They are not, and WalkBoston requests that they not be part of this (or any new) project. It is time to stop installing them, except where really needed for pedestrian safety. They are confusing, as we have often mentioned, and are not used in almost all U.S. cities.

Finally, we are interested in having more details on bus stop relocations.

Thank you for wonderful streetscape changes and the opportunity to be involved in planning them.

Sincerely,



Wendy Landman  
Executive Director



Ann Hershfang  
Board Member

Cc Tom Tinlin, Boston Transportation Commissioner  
Vineet Gupta, Planning Director, Boston Transportation Department  
John Kelly, Neighborhood Access Group